



NEWS RELEASE

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Science and Math Academy becomes reality
by Meghan Bowen, APG News

Freshmen at Aberdeen High School are exploring a world of science and math that goes beyond the textbooks thanks to a partnership between Aberdeen Proving Ground and Harford County Public Schools.

The Science and Math Academy at AHS began as a vision in the eyes of APG scientists, technologists and personnel. In 1999 a committee was formed to determine its mission, according to Donna Clem, SMA coordinator.

"APG professionals from the tenant organizations and the Garrison have worked together with the Harford County Public Schools and with members of the local community for the past several years to make the Science and Mathematics Academy a reality," said Linda Holloway, operations officer with the APG Garrison's Directorate of Community and Family Activities. "It was extremely gratifying to see the Academy open to the first class of ninth graders in the Fall of 2004."

The academy gives Aberdeen High School students, enrolled in the SMA program, an additional background in math and science, which will aid them when applying for scholarships and college, Holloway said.

"The students have a state-of-the-art facility and an environment where they are challenged to perform to their capabilities," Holloway said.

"As our student population gains more experience in math, science, and technology, we hope to utilize the experts at APG in a partnership that will enhance the learning experiences of our students," Clem said.

In fact, many of the SMA students have an affiliation with APG, according to Clem. Out of the 50 freshman students currently enrolled, six of the students are military family members and 11 are children of civilian employees at APG.

While most students came from public middle schools and a few private schools in Harford County, there were two students whose parents were stationed elsewhere, Clem said.

"Included in the freshman class is a girl whose parent was stationed in Germany and a Naval officer's daughter from Hampton, Va., who transferred to the Edgewood Area of APG," Clem said.

Ivan Mehosky, APG school liaison officer, provided the necessary information and assistance to parents and potential students throughout the application process, including the student from Germany, according to Holloway.

Holloway explained how APG professionals worked with county public school leaders and teachers to create the SMA with the expertise and resources available.

"We wanted to make it known to the community that the people at APG are reachable. So APG hosted tours of its labs and technical facilities," Holloway said. "Many of our scientists, mathematicians, and technologists have served as technical advisors on issues of equipment, laboratory requirements and set-up for the academy."

The HCPS and APG partnership will allow the SMA to train teachers in research and related skills as well as to provide an avenue for student mentoring, according to Clem.

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"We hope that teleconferencing may allow students to interact with the professional scientific community as they prepare to do their own original research," Clem said.

Our professionals have committed to working one-on-one as mentors with the academy students by assisting with projects, Holloway said.

U.S. Army Developmental Test Command's Brian Simmons, deputy to the commander/technical director, and Steve Clark, director for business development, are both members of the APG Science and Technology (S&T) Board, which has been involved every step of the way with the Academy, she said.

"Representatives from the U.S. Army Research, Development and Engineering Command, Army Materiel Systems Analysis Activity, Chemical Materials Agency, Army Environmental Center, Army Ordnance Mechanical Maintenance School, DTC, Aberdeen Test Center, APG Garrison, along with many members of the APG community have also played key roles," Holloway said.

Clark commented on APG's goals for the partnership with the students.

"We wanted to look at any opportunities to interface with all Harford County Public Schools, where our people could serve as mentors and judges for science projects, and tutoring students while trying to build bridges between the community and APG," Clark said.

"Our first real involvement, both professionally and personally, was to work with members of the APG S&T Board to support the schools on behalf of APG," Clark said.

The APG S&T Board represents APG organizations who work together as professionals and technologists to bring knowledge of the different fields of expertise together to speak as one voice and to be a single source for the local community to go to be "pointed in the right direction to the capabilities and facilities on APG," he said.

"We can give teachers an idea of how we work so that they can replicate, to a certain degree, the ideas and concepts that APG professionals use in their everyday work," Clark said.

For instance, the traditional chemistry labs are wet labs, but a lot of the current teaching takes place in a dry lab concept, according to Clark.

"The APG board can help teachers set up their space so that kids can interface with each other more directly," Clark said. "This also helps the teachers create their curriculum and provides students the opportunity to use a real world application of what they're learning in schools to reinforce what they're studying and to build interest in the subject matter."

Clark also discussed the future goals and physical advantages of the SMA labs.

"The idea is if we can eventually teleconference with schools and people around the world, then the students could get to discuss topics with a high-level scientist or engineer," Clark said. "The SMA program is in its infancy this year. There is a learning curve for all involved."

Clem referred to the "pioneers" of the SMA who are the first group of students to enroll in the program and the teachers who signed on to educate them."

"These young men and women came to the SMA on a promise of a unique educational experience. Students came to a program that had no building, no previous students, and no tried-and-true curriculum," Clem said. "Yet they are flourishing. They are now a tight knit group of friends and competitors."

"I am proud of them and I know that they will go to accomplish great things because they have our help, the help of HCPS, APG, and the professional scientific community who are ready to support and encourage them to achieve," she said.

When the SMA is fully operational it will have 200 students from grades 9-12. The SMA is in the process of evaluating applications for next year's freshman class, according to Clem.

Holloway commented on the long-term hopes and goals for the SMA students.

"What this really gives students is an advantage to achieve their own goals in higher education in science and technology," Holloway said. "After they earn their advanced degree, they will remember their experience with APG and return to Harford County to seek employment."